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ADDRESS
OF
PRESIDENT COOLIDGE

BEFORE
THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF THE
BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA

WASHINGTON, D. C.
MAY 1, 1926



WASHINGTON
GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE
1926



ADDRESS

Members of the National Council of the Boy Scouts of America:

The strength and hope of civilization lies in its power to adapt itself to changing circumstances. Development and character are not passive accomplishments. They can be secured only through action. The strengthening of the physical body, the sharpening of the senses, the quickening of the intellect, are all the result of that mighty effort which we call the struggle for existence. Down through the ages it was carried on for the most part in the open, out in the fields, along the streams, and over the surface of the sea. It was there that mankind met the great struggle which has been waged with the forces of nature. We are what that struggle has made us. When the race ceases to be engaged in that great strength-giving effort the race will not be what it is now—it will change to something else. These age-old activities or their equivalent are vital to a continuation of human development. They are invaluable in the growth and training of youth.

Towns and cities and industrial life are very recent and modern acquirements. Such an environment did not contribute to the making of the race, nor was it bred in the lap of present-day luxury. It was born of adversity and nurtured by necessity. Though the environment has greatly changed, human nature has not changed. If the same natural life in the open requiring something of the same struggle, surrounded by the same elements of adversity and necessity, is gradually passing away in the experience of the great mass of the people; if the old struggle with nature no longer goes on; if the usual environment has been very largely changed, it becomes exceedingly necessary that an artificial environment be created to supply the necessary process for a continuation of the development and character of the race. The cinder track must be substituted for the chase.

Art therefore has been brought in to take the place of nature. One of the great efforts in that direction is represented by the Boy Scout movement. It was founded in the United States in 1910. In September of that year the organization was given a great impetus by the visit of the man whom we are delighted to honor this evening, Sir Robert Baden-Powell. This distinguished British general is now known all over the world as the originator of this idea. That it has been introduced into almost every civilized country must be to him a constant source of great gratification. The first annual meeting was held in the East Room of the White House in February, 1911, when President Taft made an address, and each of his successors has been pleased to serve as the honorary president of the association. It has been dignified by a Federal charter granted by the Congress

to the Boy Scouts of America in 1916, and thereby ranks in the popular mind with the only two other organizations which have been similarly honored, the Red Cross and the American Legion.

The Boy Scouts have been fortunate in enlisting the interest of prominent men of our country to serve as the active head of the organization. For the current year that position was held by no less a figure than the late James J. Storrow. His untimely taking off was a sad experience to all of us who knew him. I cherished him personally as a friend. I admired him for the broad public spirit that he always exhibited. Amid all the varied and exacting activities as one of our foremost business men, he yet found time to devote his thought and energy and personal attention to the advancement of this movement. His memory will constantly bring to us all that sentiment which he uttered in the New Year message that he gave to the scouts, in expressing the hope that it might bring "A more vivid realization that it is the spirit and the spiritual sides of life that count."

The more I have studied this movement, its inception, purposes, organization, and principles, the more I have been impressed. Not only is it based on the fundamental rules of right thinking and acting but it seems to embrace in its code almost every virtue needed in the personal and social life of mankind. It is a wonderful instrument for good. It is an inspiration to you whose duty and privilege it is to widen its horizon and extend its influence. If every boy in the United States between the ages of 12 and 17 could be placed under the wholesome influences of the scout program and should live up to the scout oath and rules, we would hear fewer pessimistic words as to the future of our Nation.

The boy on becoming a scout binds himself on his honor to do his best, as the oath reads:

"1. To do my duty to God and my country, and to obey the scout law.

"2. To help other people at all times.

"3. To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight."

The 12 articles in these scout laws are not prohibitions, but obligations; affirmative rules of conduct. Members must promise to be trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent. How comprehensive this list! What a formula for developing moral and spiritual character! What an opportunity for splendid service in working to strengthen their observance by all scouts and to extend their influence to all boys eligible for membership! It would be a perfect world if everyone exemplified these virtues in daily life.

Acting under these principles, remarkable progress has been made. Since 1910, 3,000,000 boys in the United States have been scouts—one out of every seven eligible. Who can estimate the physical, mental, and spiritual force that would have been added to our national life during this period if the other six also had been scouts?

On January 1, 1926, there was an enrollment of nearly 600,000 boys, directed by 165,000 volunteer leaders and divided among 23,000 troops. Such is the field that has been cultivated. The great need

now is for more leaders, inspired for service and properly equipped to carry out the program. It is estimated that 1,000,000 additional boys could be enrolled immediately if adequate leadership could be provided. We can not do too much honor to the 500,000 men who in the past 16 years have given freely of their time and energy as scout masters and assistant scout masters. Such service is service to God and to country. The efforts to get more devoted volunteers and to find and train those fitted and willing to make this their life work is worthy of the most complete success.

Because the principles of this movement are affirmative, I believe they are sound. The boy may not be merely passive in his allegiance to righteousness. He must be an active force in his home, his church, and his community. Too few people have a clear realization of the real purposes of the Boy Scouts. In the popular mind the program is arranged for play, for recreation, is designed solely to utilize the spare time of the boy in such a way that he may develop physically while engaged in pleasurable pursuits. This is but a faint conception, one almost wholly misleading. The program is a means to an end. Its fundamental object is to use modern environment in character building and training for citizenship.

Character is what a person is; it represents the aggregate of distinctive mental and moral qualities belonging to an individual or a race. Good character means a mental and moral fiber of high order, one which may be woven into the fabric of the community and State, going to make a great nation—great in the broadest meaning of that word.

The organization of the scouts is particularly suitable for a representative democracy such as ours, where our institutions rest on the theory of self-government and public functions are exercised through delegated authority. The boys are taught to practice the basic virtues and principles of right living and to act for themselves in accordance with such virtues and principles. They learn self-direction and self-control.

The organization is not intended to take the place of the home or religion, but to supplement and cooperate with those important factors in our national life. We hear much talk of the decline in the influence of religion, of the loosening of the home ties, of the lack of discipline—all tending to break down reverence and respect for the laws of God and of man. Such thought as I have been able to give to the subject and such observations as have come within my experience have convinced me that there is no substitute for the influences of the home and of religion. These take hold of the innermost nature of the individual and play a very dominant part in the formation of personality and character. This most necessary and most valuable service has to be performed by the parents, or it is not performed at all. It is the root of the family life. Nothing else can ever take its place. These duties can be performed by foster parents with partial success, but any attempt on the part of the Government to function in these directions breaks down almost entirely. The Boy Scout movement can never be a success as a substitute but only as an ally of strict parental control and family life under religious influences. Parents can not shift their responsibility. If they fail to exercise proper control, nobody else can do it for them.

The last item in the scout "duodecalogue" is impressive. It declares that a scout shall be reverent. "He is reverent toward God," the paragraph reads. "He is faithful in his religious duty—respects the convictions of others in matters of custom and religion." In the past I have declared my conviction that our Government rests upon religion; that religion is the source from which we derive our reverence for truth and justice, for equality and liberty, and for the rights of mankind. So wisely and liberally is the Boy Scout movement designed that the various religious denominations have found it a most helpful agency in arousing and maintaining interest in the work of their various societies. This has helped to emphasize in the minds of youth the importance of teaching our boys to respect the religious opinions and social customs of others.

The scout theory takes the boy at an age when he is apt to get ensnared in the complexities and false values of our latter-day life, and it turns his attention toward the simple, the natural, the genuine. It provides a program for the utilization of his spare time outside his home and school and church duties. While oftentimes recreational, it is in the best sense constructive. It aims to give a useful outlet for the abundant energies of the boy, to have valuable knowledge follow innate curiosity, to develop skill and self-reliance—the power to bring things to pass—by teaching one how to use both the hand and the head. In the city-bred boy is developed love for the country, a realization of what nature means, of its power to heal the wounds and to soothe the frayed nerves incident to modern civilization. He learns that in the woods and on the hillside, on the plain, and by the stream, he has a chance to think upon the eternal verities, to get a clarity of vision—a chance which the confusion and speed of city life too often renders difficult if not impossible of attainment. There is a very real value in implanting this idea in our boys. When they take up the burdens of manhood they may be led to return to the simple life for periods of physical, mental, and spiritual refreshment and reinvigoration.

Scouting very definitely teaches that rewards come only after achievement through personal effort and self-discipline. The boy enters as a tenderfoot. As he develops he becomes a second-class scout and then a first-class scout. Still there is before him the opportunity, in accordance with ability and hard work, to advance and get merit badges for proficiency in some 70 subjects pertaining to the arts, trades, and sciences. It is interesting to learn that in the year 1925, 195,000 merit badges were awarded as compared with 140,000 in 1924. Twenty-one such awards make the boy an "eagle scout," the highest rank. Not only does one learn to do things, but in many instances he learns what he can do best. He is guided to his life work. Vocational experts will tell you in dollars and cents what this means to society where so often much valuable time and effort is wasted by the young before they have tested, proven, and trained their individual powers.

The boy learns "to be prepared." This is the motto of the scouts. They are prepared to take their proper place in life, prepared to meet any unusual situation arising in their personal or civic relations. The scout is taught to be courageous and self-sacrificing. Individually he must do one good deed each day. He

is made to understand that he is a part of organized society; that he owes an obligation to that society. Among the many activities in which the scouts have rendered public service are those for the protection of birds and wild life generally, for the conservation of natural resources, reforestation, for carrying out the "Safety first" idea. They have taken part in campaigns for church cooperation, in drives against harmful literature, and the promotion of an interest in wholesome, worth-while reading. In many communities they have cooperated with the police and fire departments. In some instances they have studied the machinery of government by temporary and volunteer participation in the city and State administration. During the war they helped in the Liberty-loan campaigns, and more recently they have assisted in "Get out the vote" movements.

All of this is exceedingly practical. It provides a method both for the training of youth and adapting him to modern life. The age-old principle of education through action and character through effort is well exemplified, but in addition the very valuable element has been added of a training for community life. It has been necessary for society to discard some of its old individualistic tendencies and promote a larger liberty and a more abundant life by cooperative effort. This theory has been developed under the principle of the division of labor, but the division of labor fails completely if any one of the divisions ceases to function.

It is well that boys should learn that lesson at an early age. Very soon they will be engaged in carrying on the work of the world. Some will enter the field of transportation, some of banking, some of industry, some of agriculture; some will be in the public service, in the police department, in the fire department, in the Post Office Department, in the health department. The public welfare, success, and prosperity of the Nation will depend upon the proper coordination of all these various efforts and upon each loyally performing the service undertaken. It will no longer do for those who have assumed the obligation to society of carrying on these different functions to say that as a body they are absolutely free and independent and responsible to no one but themselves. The public interest is greater than the interest of any one of these groups, and it is absolutely necessary that this interest be made supreme. But there is just as great a necessity on the part of the public to see that each of these groups is justly treated. Otherwise, government and society will be thrown into chaos. On each one of us rests a moral obligation to do our share of the world's work. We have no right to refuse.

The training of the Boy Scouts fits them to an early realization of this great principle and adapts them in habits and thoughts and life to its observances. We know too well what fortune overtakes those who attempt to live in opposition to these standards. They become at once rightfully and truly branded as outlaws. However much they may boast of their freedom from all restraints and their disregard of all conventionalities of society, they are immediately the recognized foes of their brethren. Their short existence is lived under greater and greater restrictions; in terror of the law, in flight from arrest, or in imprisonment. Instead of gaining freedom, they become the slaves of their own evil doing, realizing the scriptural

assertion that they who sin are the servants of sin and that the wages of sin is death. The Boy Scout movement has been instituted in order that the youth, instead of falling under the domination of habits and actions that lead only to destruction, may come under the discipline of a training that leads to eternal life. They learn that they secure freedom and prosperity by observing the law.

This is but one of the many organizations that are working for good in our country. Some of them have a racial basis, some a denominational basis. All of them in their essence are patriotic and religious. Their steady growth and widening influence go very far to justify our faith in the abiding fitness of things. We can not deny that there are evil forces all about us, but a critical examination of what is going on in the world can not fail to justify the belief that wherever these powers of evil may be located, however great may be their apparent extent, they are not realities, and somewhere there is developing an even greater power of good by which they will be overcome.

We need a greater faith in the strength of right living. We need a greater faith in the power of righteousness. These are the realities which do not pass away. On these everlasting principles rests the movement of the Boy Scouts of America. It is one of the growing institutions by which our country is working out the fulfillment of an eternal promise.

